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ABSTRACT

In order to work effectively with the media, early childhood educators need to be able to view their public relations needs from the media person's perspective, and to prepare or package their service as a product in a way that is familiar to media people. This address offers suggestions concerning appropriate attitudes towards publicity, communicating consistently with all sectors linked to the educator's service, and ways of working with news media. Media comments focus on newspapers, newsletters, guest appearances on radio and television, public services announcements, and audio or video spots or cassettes. Concluding remarks describe ways in which a public relations message can be designed to meet the needs of television stations, address community interests, and intervene in community problems. (RH)

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REACHING TODAY'S FAMILIES THROUGH THE MEDIA:
What Programs Need to Know

The Family Resource Coalition National Conference, 10/88 Chicago

Introduction: The reason you are attending my seminar at this national conference is that your program's image is very important to you. You want to know ways to promote a positive image; eg; good public relations, on an ongoing basis. To do this effectively, you will need to know how to work with all avenues of media...newsprint, radio, and television. Our time will not permit us the luxury of indepth education on broadcast media or journalism. However, I will share some basic information and "tips" which will be helpful to you.

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Those of us in the field have another important agenda besides good "PR" for our programs, programs which serve children and families. We also want to reach out to parents and the public effectively with information that is in the best interest of children and families. We know that today's families want and need information that we can share, but we also know that today's parents want to receive information through the electronic media of radio and television; they don't just want to read it. No matter how "good" or indepth the written information might be, today's parents and the general public often prefer radio and television for access to new information. Those of

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us in the field may not like this reality, but we must be able to accept it and work with it.

If you decide to "commit" to the concept of working with all avenues of media in conjunction with what you do for children and families in your programs, there will be times in which you are frustrated. 1) You will be frustrated if you don't learn the basics of what media people want from you in order to implement, publish, or air your information. 2) You may also be frustrated because of the "turnover" of contact people in the media. Media people in newspapers, radio, and television seem to change jobs, titles and stations several times a year. 3) You may be frustrated by what seems to be a lack of commitment or dedication on the part of media people to the things or issues YOU believe are important.

In order to survive these frustrations and setbacks, it is most important that you have a "burning desire" or dedication to your beliefs about positive things you can share with teachers, parents, and/or children. You must have this commitment and let it show, despite the fact that you will often need to work with people who do not understand it and who do not share your values.

Two things will help you most in getting through the "stress times." One is awareness that it's O.K. for others to have different values than your own. In our field we prioitize "our stuff." Other fields have different priorities, and we have to accept this. We have to realize that we can only control what we do, believe or think, not what others do or believe.

The second thing you must do is try to see the service you provide as a product, as well as a service. This will help you see what you prepare or give to media people in a new way, eg. you need to try to see it the way it is perceived by media people who focus on packaging, products, and selling.

The crux of working with media people effectively is to see their side of the problem, and to prepare or package what you give them in a way that is familiar to them. To do this you need to make things as clear and easy for them as possible, and you need to show them "what's in it for them."

This may sound cold or calculating, but it is not. You do not have to sacrifice one iota of your values or beliefs or "mission" to do this. All you need to remember is that using media effectively is a means to an end; your end goals can remain intact.

I. ATTITUDES. You must believe in what you're doing and let it SHOW!

A. Public Relations is important! No one else will do it; those of us who work with children and families must do our own PR; we must put OURSELVES in the "Big Picture." The public must see us positively.

B. Think of yourselves as professionals. That is what you are! (NO ONE ELSE IS GOING TO PROMOTE YOU OR OUR FIELD)

C. Join professional organizations - pick these carefully as related to your own priorities - serve on committees. Put whatever you do in the newspapers!

D. See your work as a PRODUCT as well as a service.

II. NETWORKING: Communicate consistently to your parents, board, staff, and lessors.

A. Use your meetings and newsletters more effectively. Make written reports to community boards or persons you lease from and send copies of minutes and newsletters.

B. Always write thank-you letters to anyone and everyone who helps you in any way. (Especially try to include newspaper printed thank yous.) Use "letters to the Editor" columns for this. Try to have a publicity person on board or staff. Doing a good job of Public Relations is almost a full-time job.

C. Parents are the best PR. Try to hold meetings that relate to the child and family with their needs and interests. Try to do pre and post sessions with staff and parent staff involvement. Thank parents with newsletters and awards. Prospective parents are much easier to find if you do a good PR job all year with local newspapers, radio, and television.

D. Organizations with whom to communicate about your program's events, etc.

Y.M.C.A.
Youth Action Bureau
Probate Court Volunteers
Schools and Title I Programs
Scouts and 4 H Programs
Women's Resource Centers
Association for Children
Clubs:w/Learning Disabilities
P.T.A.
Big Brother/Big Sister
Head Start and Human Services Agencies
Teen Parent Programs
Child Guidance Clinics
Child Study Associations
Parents Anonymous
Cooperative Extension Services
Newcomers, A.A.U.W., League of Women Voters
Other pre-school centers
Parents Without Partners

E. Events to use as PR vehicles.

Week of the Young Child
Open Houses
Regular meetings
Conferences attended
Any community services events
Art displays
Visitors and field trips
Fund-raising events
Workshops
Help given to another organization
Student observers or teachers
Senior citizens help or visits to them

III. THE MEDIA. Tips for working with news media.

A. Newspapers: Pictures given to the news media could be any size but should be glossy black and white (giving negatives is sometimes helpful, but they may be lost). Type and double space any articles you write. Include a contact person's name and phone number with the article; you may also want to suggest a headline, although it may not be used. Always try to include a photo with any article. Make everything easy for newspapers, eg. do their work for them, in a sense. Always hand deliver to the right person at the paper.

B. Newsletters: Club newsletters are printed media which costs you nothing. These are already on-going, and are ways to inform which you can often tie into; Know the contact person for each newsletter, their phone number, and deadline dates of the newsletter. Then, communicate, whenever possible, with the contact person. Let the club newsletter tell people about your special workshop, program, etc.

C. Guest Appearances: Be a guest and be interviewed on radio or television as often as possible. Be seen as a "regular" or on-going resource person. Always ask for an air check or dub when you appear or are on air as a guest. Tell the station ahead of time that you will want an air check (radio) or dub (video).

D. The PSA (Public Services Announcement): This is the public service time on television and radio which is always available. Use this PSA time to promote and inform the public about what you are doing in your program.

1. PSA Preparation. PSA time for community announcements or announcements of events is usually 15 to 30 seconds. Some PSA time slots are 90 seconds. Some slots are even 2 to 3 minutes or more. Ask your station what kinds of PSA time is available and would work best for your subject. Then write up your script, practice it and time it before you go to the station to tape it. If you use TV PSA time, try to have some slides to leave to be shown while the voice message is on. Ask about correct slide format! Slides must be horizontal, bright, and picture filled to edges of frame.
2. "News Releases" If your PSA is just a brief announcement, you can simply type double spaced, on a half sheet of paper, make copies, and drop it off at each station and newspaper. Remember to put a name and phone number on it as contact person and head it "Immediate Release."
3. "Contacts" Make a list of all contact persons for PSA time and each radio and TV station. Have all phone numbers on the list. When they get to know you, you can often call them to help you out when you have something special going on that you want to tell the public about.

4. Cable Access. Find out how to use "cable access" community service television time in your community. It's free and almost all communities have a method and a resource for using cable access time. Make calls, find a contact and use it.

IV. AUDIO or VIDEO SPOTS or CASSETTES. If you have preproduced, pre-taped spots or segments, either audio or video, or you can access the means to prepare these, it can be a great advantage to both your program and the stations! As an example, let me tell you about the audio cassettes or "Parent Talk" Radio Spot Series I have produced. "Parent Talk" is really a series of 3 60 min. audio cassettes. (Series I, "Q & A's About 2-5 Year Olds;" Series II, "Q & A's About School Age Children;" Series III "Teenagers") On each 60 min. cassette are approximately 30 90 second spots or segments which can be aired as PSA's. These cassettes are used on site by programs as well as aired on radio.

A. If you want to do this, you will have to find money from a grant or use your own money to produce broadcast quality radio spots on a master cassette tape made from a reel-to-reel master tape. To do this you need to pay for production costs (at least $600 to $800 for a 60 min. audio cassette) in a recording studio. Then you'll need to pay the cost to dub or copy each cassette you need.

B. Next you must convince a station to air your spots either as a public service, OR to find you a sponsor to air the spots with paid air time. To do this the station must see "what's in it for them." Your "pitch" to the station must include the "whys." Here are examples of whys you should think about before approaching a station: THE WHYS: YOUR LOCAL RADIO STATION WILL BE SEEN AS A STATION THAT "CARES." Airing these spots will strengthen the station's participatory community image, and parents in your community will receive ongoing, practical, positive-parenting messages to which they might otherwise have no access. As advocates for children and families it is important that we use the media of radio whenever possible to reach out to all parents with information they need and want.

C. WHAT TO DO NEXT. Take the audio cassette tape, a letter of permission for its use, and a "promo sheet" (description of all the programs on your cassette) to your local radio stations. Call the station first for an appointment with the programming director or station owner/manager. Find a station which will air these "spots" regularly. ("Parent Talk" can be aired weekly at any time of the year, or may be aired daily for one month to promote a special event or activity.)

D. WORKING WITH THE STATION. Assure the station that 1) each segment is clearly "cued" by title and segment number. Be sure this is done during production! and 2) that the broadcast quality is very good. THEY SHOULD TAKE ALL PRECAUTIONS TO

D. (Working With the Station continues)
INSURE OR MAINTAIN THIS QUALITY WHEN THEY "CART IT UP." Be sure your cassette is clearly labled SAVE with your name and phone number securely on it. Make it clear that YOU WILL WANT THE CASSETTE RETURNED TO YOU for your own future use, or to bring it to them again for replay-re-airing at some future time. Have the station "cart up" the material; ie., copy or dub it into their own system and equipment. Get your original back after this is done.

E. The same procedure can be used to produce video spots and have them aired, but is much more expensive. Video costs about $1,000 a minute to produce.

In closing, I want to sum up by quoting for you a commentary on TV public service programming from Jerry Winshow, president of Wishnow Group Inc., Marblehead, Massachusetts, which develops public affairs projects for broadcasters. Among the programs are For Kids' Sake, A World of Difference, Beautiful Babies...Right From the Start and The Volunteer Connection.

Wishnow says this: "When you cut through all of the broadcasting jargon and technology, all you really have left is one person talking to another. If that person---your audience---perceives you as just another vendor of entertainment and information, you will be received in just that way---as a vendor.

If, however, you are seen as somebody working hard to make people's downtown safe, protect their kid from drugs and alcohol and lead their community to invest more in itself and its improvement, they will treat you not as a vendor but as a friend and ally.

Pretty basic stuff. And the television stations that have historically taken on this basic role of friend and ally--the WCVB's, WBZ's, WCCO's, KING'S--have found that this approach pays dividends in very potent ways. They can count on audience loyalty when the network goes through its periodic slump or the prize anchorman is lured away by the competition; they have discovered that their audience stays with the station that cares.

Willis Duff of Audience Research and Development in Dallas reached a similar conclusion concerning viewer motivation for watching local TV news: "In teaching hundreds of reasons that viewers use to select a local newscast as their favorite, we have found that the station which is perceived to be most involved in contributing to and caring for its community is almost always number one in news ratings or on the way to that position."

In helping create and mount public affairs campaigns we have found that in addition to gaining viewer loyalty, this approach also provides:

*Intense, highly dramatic, relevant programing.
*Promotional and programing strategies that can affect station ratings.
*Long-term positioning of the station as community leader and friend.
*A strong vehicle for positive local and national publicity.
*Merchandising tools for station clients.

*Creation of ongoing working partnerships with government, civic groups and clients.

*A positive management opportunity to promote in-station teamwork and morale.

*Local and national awards.

*Additional assurance of maintaining integrity of station license by directly contributing to FCC public service commitment.

*Most important...the delivery of meaningful, measurable services on behalf of station audiences.

Oh--it feels good, too.

So why doesn't everybody do it? Well, interestingly enough, more stations are doing it. With broadcast deregulation, it has become much less cumbersome to give project underwriters on-air exposure.

The reason, however, that even more stations don't get involved is that the process looks much too foreboding. And indeed, in a way, it can be. The best projects deal with major social issues. If you are really trying to intervene in these issues in a measurable way (as we think is vital), you can't just find a problem and "go for it." You have to do your homework and actually get involved in the fabric of the issue.

The approach we recommend is that the station first isolate a critical, ongoing community issue. Something serious and substantive--as opposed to fluffy and feel good--like prejudice reduction, infant mortality or crime prevention. The bigger the problem, the bigger the impact.

Then research it. Figure out if there is some way to intervene in it. Remember that you can't expect to create a final solution; instead, you chip away at the problem. It's like shaving: You get points for just staying even.

If you can't measure what you did when it's all through, then you probably created a promotion. There's nothing wrong with promotions, but good deeds should write their own press releases. All our projects have serious outside evaluations attached to them so we know when all is said and done what worked and what didn't. The accolades come from the results.

The hardest part is designing an effective intervention--a way to really reduce the problem rather than just talk about it. The creating of this "magic bullet" takes research creativity and persistence.

Once the intervention is crafted, the next challenge is to put together the pieces. One method is similar to a three-legged stool. The first leg of the stool, the broadcaster, is where all the magic resides. It is a rare manager that doesn't intuitively see the value of harnessing normally low-productive PSA and community time to assist his or her audience and position the station. Over and above PSA time, we suggest to a station that it is in its best interest to consider involving its news, programming, community affairs and promotion departments heavily in the campaign. In essence, the broadcaster becomes the marketing arm for the campaign.

But who does the heavy lifting? Who provides that measurable and ongoing intervention? This is the second leg of the stool. Usually it is a major nonprofit institution such as the Anti-Deflamation League or the United Way with all of the credibility and experience necessary to get the job done. It is also its mission to deal with the particular problem, and it would all but "kill" to get the kind of air time that the broadcaster is now willing to voluntarily provide.

The nonprofit essentially becomes the manufacturing arm of the campaign.

Who pays for the project? Usually not the broadcaster; he has given the air time and packaging. Nor the nonprofit. It usually lacks the dollars to begin with. That brings you to the third leg of the stool. Depending on the issue, sometimes it is a foundation, sometimes government, more often than not, a major business in a community. The business can gain guaranteed institutional exposure from the broadcast partner and help its community at the same time.

It is completely a win-win situation for all. Ultimately, it's the public who benefits the most. It wins because it gets a free measurable service to help improve its lives and communities.

What differentiates this approach from the way broadcasters normally do business is that when all is said and done, they are seen, and correctly so, as people helping people. When you take out all the GRP's,

C-P-M's and uplinks and downlinks, that's really all you have left, and when it comes to gaining continued viewer loyalty, it's really all you need."

Wishnow's commentary appeared in Broadcasting Magazine (p.21) May 9, 1988.